

2007 Annual Report

INTRODUCTION

2007 was a busy year for the Board of Elections. HAVA implementation continued to be problematical due to State and Federal issues. We had a large number of local offices up for election, which required a lot of staff time helping candidates and dealing with petitions, filings, and financial disclosures. We also implemented the new Statewide Database.

STATEWIDE DATABASE

The first half of 2007 found us involved in extensive preparations for the July roll out of the new statewide voter database (NYSVOTER II). All states are required to have a statewide database, as per the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). To comply with this law in 2006 we used a temporary database (NYSVOTER I), basically cobbled together and rather inefficient. The new database has proved extremely useful and performed very well.

Preparing for the implementation meant quite a bit of work on our county database records, as well as adding new software and hardware. To meet the technical requirements we purchased a new server running Microsoft SQL, and provided a dedicated PC to serve as the “IMS” machine. (The IMS machine is the message handler, firewall and interface between the County and the State).

This project would have been impossible without the help and assistance of Greg Potter and his staff at Tompkins County’s Information Technology Services. They provided answers to all the technical questions, and set up the hardware and software needed to implement the new system. They continue to help us with the operation and maintenance of our server and the IMS PC.

We also appreciated the hard work of NTS Data Services, who provide and support our local registration database and election management system (TEAM), and supplied the new IMS software.

Finally, we very much appreciate the work George Stanton and his staff at the state board have done over the last two years to bring this complicated project to fruition. George’s team was very good at keeping us informed and soliciting feedback as the project progressed over the last two years.

NEW POLL SITES

In 2007 we opened two new poll sites. The Museum of the Earth replaced West Hill Fire House, and we returned to Ellis Hollow Apartments, replacing Reis Tennis Center.

STREETFINDER

We continued maintenance on our Streetfinder database, coding in the majority of School Districts. This will allow us to better serve neighboring districts, who often request voter registration information from us.

PLAN “B” MACHINE

In 2006, as part of the Department of Justice suit, we were required to purchase a special voting machine that could be used by voters with disabilities. We purchased an Avante Vote-Trakker auto-ballot-marking machine. Because the state did not certify any new voting machines in 2007, we continued to offer voters the use of this machine at the board office. However, there was very little interest in using it; sometimes one voter would show up, sometimes none.

As of this writing, we expect that the Avante machine will finally be replaced by a new ballot marking device in 2008. We will be required to have one such machine in each poll site for the fall elections. We expect that the machine we purchase will also contain an optical scanner that would then be used by all voters in 2009. But all this depends on final system certification and the directives of the State Board and Federal officials.

ELECTIONS

2007 had four Village elections in the spring, and a Democratic Primary for Town Supervisor in September. The General Election in November had about 50 local offices plus three Supreme Court Justices and a statewide proposition. Then we had a special election in December to fill a vacancy on the county legislature.

In addition to the above, we provided help and assistance for quite a few school district, library, and fire district elections throughout the year.

In November's General Election the race for the Town of Caroline's second Town Councilperson's seat initially ended in a tie, pending challenges and objections to a couple of ballots. The race wasn't decided until two months after the election, when the judge finally ruled on what could be counted. In the end, Peter Hoyt defeated Steve Nicholson by two votes, 591 to 589.

2007 also saw two extremely close Village races. Groton Trustee, Elizabeth T. Conger beat Linda Bonavia by 2 votes, 156 to 154, and Dryden Trustee, Robert Witty beat Lisa Valentinelli by 3 votes, 171 to 168. Such results underscore the importance of our mission to encourage voter participation, and ensure that each and every eligible vote is accurately counted.

FULL DOCUMENT IMAGING PROJECT

2007 was the first full year of access to our full document imaging files. This capability has saved the staff untold hours, and allowed us to quickly answer questions and solve problems.

WEB SITE

Our website, votetompkins.com, run in-house by Deputy Tom Paolangeli, continued to receive very heavy usage. We had 19,204 visitors in 2007, generating 306,088 hits. We averaged about 1600 visitors a month, with a peak of 4,159 in November. We strive to put as much information as possible out on the web. Doing so saves time and money in the office, and citizens very much appreciate quick and easy access to information. Well over 120 new content pages were uploaded, containing such items as sample ballots, results, and forms.

STAFF

In a year full of many changes, it was helpful that our staff stayed the same: Commissioners Elizabeth Cree and Stephen DeWitt, Deputies Krystal Hastings and Tom Paolangeli, and Senior Clerks Jennifer Terpening and Laura Owens all had the advantage of prior experience with our office procedures and the election process. Due to the complexity of election law, there is a fairly steep learning curve, so it is very helpful when our whole team is already "up to speed."

BY THE NUMBERS

Voter Database:

At the end of 2007 we had 47,617 Active voters and 12,249 Inactive voters in our database.

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| New Registrations Processed | 2,946 |
| In County Address Changes | 3,350 |
| Enrollment Changes | 540 |
| Name Changes | 291 |
| Duplicate Applications | 496 |
| Confirmation Notices Sent | 4,312 |
| Registrations Cancelled | 2,960 |

The above figures are fairly close to 2006, except for Registrations Cancelled, which was triple the amount of the previous year. This was due to a big effort to clean up our local database and the implementation of the final version of the statewide database. The end result is that our database is now a much more accurate representation of actual voters in Tompkins County.

Inspectors:

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| Inspectors Appointed & Trained | 314 |
| Classes Held | 30 |

Mailcheck:

(Used to verify voter's residence and mailing address, notify them of election dates and their polling site, and recruit inspectors.)

| | |
|------------|--------|
| Mailed out | 47,408 |
| Returned | 2,778 |

Absentee Ballots Out:

| | |
|---------|-------|
| Primary | 107 |
| General | 1,010 |

Petitions Received:

| | |
|-------------|-----|
| Designating | 163 |
| Independent | 27 |

LOOKING AHEAD

2008 is shaping up to be an exceptional year for many reasons. Voter registration is always huge in a Presidential year, requiring extra staff time to keep up with data entry, absentee applications, and voter questions and problems. Early indications are that we might very well have a record voter turn out in 2008.

As noted above under “Plan B Machine,” in 2008 we will buy and provide a new Ballot Marking Device for each poll site. This will require extensive training for technicians and inspectors. We also will need to address the storage and maintenance facility issues resulting from the new equipment. We will attempt to consolidate some election districts, as a way to reduce purchase costs of new equipment and lessen the number of inspectors needed.

We will also need to finalize plans in 2008 for a comprehensive voter outreach and inspector/technician training program for 2009, when we will begin using the new voting system.